

save us from much fleecing in that way. I need scarcely add, that no good can result from an attempt to penetrate into the interior of China by a party of foreigners, unless some one of them has at least a moderate facility in expressing himself in conversation with the people.

IV.—*Observations on an Article in Loudon's Magazine of Natural History, on the subject of the Albatross. By Lieut. THOMAS HUTTON, 37th Regt. N. I.*

At page 147 of the 32nd Number of Loudon's Magazine of Natural History, a contributor observes :

“COLERIDGE somewhere in his wild and magical ‘Rime of the Antient Mariner,’ says of the Albatross, whom he introduces as a bird of Omen.”

“ At length did cross an Albatross,  
Thorough the fog it came ;  
As if it had been a Christian soul,  
We hail'd it in God's name.

“ It ate the food it ne'er had eat,  
And round and round it flew ;  
The ice did split with a thunder-fit,  
The helmsman steer'd us through.

“ And a good south-wind sprung up behind,  
The Albatross did follow,  
And every day for food or play,  
Came to the mariners' hollo.”

“Had this Albatross been a sea-gull, the above might have been fact, as well as fancy.”

To which another writer adds, at page 372 of the 34th Number.

“And not less so, it may be remarked, if it be presumed, that COLERIDGE actually speaks of the Albatross itself. This bird is one of the Laridæ, or gull tribe ; and as our correspondent Mr. MAIN has in person remarked to us, ‘ every voyager round the Cape of Good Hope may have observed it to follow and fly round the passing vessel from day to day.’ He added, ‘ this large bird seems to subsist on any animal matter which floats on the water. In their following of ships they are easily caught by a strong hook baited with a bit of pork or beef.— Their body appears emaciated, being small in proportion to the size of their plumage ; as the wings, when extended, measure 9 or 10 feet from tip to tip. They appear to be very stupid birds, perhaps from being broken-hearted, from the paucity of food they meet with 800 miles from the nearest land.’

“Dr. ARNOTT, as quoted by Mr. RENNIE, remarks, ‘How powerful must be the wing muscles of birds which sustain themselves in the sky for many hours ! The great Albatross, with wings extended 14 feet or more, is seen in the stormy solitudes of the southern ocean, accompanying ships for whole days, without ever resting on the waves.’”

“Mr. MAIN, whom apprehension of exceeding the truth always leads to speak within bounds, gives above the spread of the wings at 9 or 10 feet ; Dr. ARNOTT,

as appears by Mr. RENNIE'S quotation, at '14 feet or more;' while the specimen in the Zoological Society's Museum in Bruton Street, and we have seen this specimen, is set down in the Society's catalogue, where a picture of it is given at the following dimensions:—'Length from tip of bill to extremity of tail 3 feet 4 inches, expansion of wings, 9 feet.' The mean of these three statements of the spread of the wings of the Albatross is 10 feet 10 inches\*: and although true, without doubt, is the proverb '*medio tutissimus ibis*,' we care less about the precise dimensions, than to show that the expansion is on all hands admitted to be great. This great expansion of wings, and that wonderful provision in the physiology of birds, by which they are enabled to charge and fill every bone in their body with rarified air, to promote and secure as by a series of balloons their buoyancy; and together with the comparative smallness, and therefore lightness of the body, of the Albatross, in part prepare us to give credence to a supposition entertained by some, that this bird sleeps while on the wing, and the great distance from any land at which it is frequently seen towards the close of day farther favours the supposition.

"This power of sleeping in the air has been alluded to by THOMAS MOORE in his beautiful Eastern poem of *Lalla Rookh*, when describing a rocky mountain beetling awfully o'er the sea of Oman, he says:

' While on its peak, that braved the sky,  
A ruin'd temple tower'd so high,  
That oft the sleeping Albatross,  
Struck the wild ruins with her wing,  
And from her cloud-rocked slumbering  
Started, to find man's dwelling there,  
In her own silent fields of air.'

"The Albatross is doubtless spoken of in the following facts, told us by a sailor friend, now dead and gone: 'A very large bird, sometimes alights on the yards of vessels passing the coast of the Cape of Good Hope, and no sooner is it upon the yards, than it is asleep, and while sleeping, is very easily captured. When upon the deck, it cannot soar into the air, on account of the length of its wings. It makes a loud and disagreeable noise when molested. It is called 'the Booby' by the crew.

"The term Booby is, we have since been told, commonly applied by sailors to any long-winged bird, of a whitish colour; although in the above case of the Albatross, the term would seem to express its incautious or booby-like habit of going to sleep within reach of molestation; a habit which those who scout the idea of the bird's sleeping in the air will impute to the desperateness of its necessity."

\* I am informed by a gentleman at this station, who came out on the "*William Fairlie*," that an Albatross was shot on the 23rd March, in lat. 26° 57' south, long. 29° 9' west, which was wholly white, with the exception of a few feathers clouded with pale-brown on the wings. It measured 12 feet from tip to tip of the wings. On the 8th April, five more were shot in lat. 37° 18' south, long. 14° 26' east. The flesh was good, and not at all fishy to the taste. It was dry and insipid.

As there are several points in this paper on which the writer seems to be misinformed, and which are rather far-fetched, I have ventured to draw a few strictures on it, and to add an extract from a Journal which I kept during a voyage from England to Calcutta.

First then, speaking of Albatrosses, the writer says, "*They appear to be stupid birds, perhaps from being broken-hearted from the paucity of food, &c. &c.*"

The body of the Albatross, when cleared from the plumage, is certainly very small, and appears out of proportion to the great size of the bird in length and breadth; but, at the same time, though small in size, the two birds which I dissected were extremely plump and fleshy, bearing no signs of a paucity of food, of which there is an abundance, for who that has rounded the Cape has not seen the shoals of flying fish which ever and anon rise from the water as the ship disturbs them in her course. Fish, Mollusca, and Medusæ form the food of the Albatross.

Why then should he break his heart at the thoughts of starvation!!

Again, "*The great Albatross, with wings extended &c. is said to accompany ships for whole days without ever resting on the waves.*"

Here I would remark, that his not *having been seen* to settle, is no proof that he *did not* do so, during these whole days, to say nothing of the intervening nights—inasmuch as, it is very unlikely that he was watched for whole days incessantly by any person, and those who have been to sea, and have paid attention to these birds, must acknowledge that they do not merely "fly round the ship," but extend their flight far away over the boundless deep, and are lost to sight, ever and anon returning to the ship in their restless search for food.

Besides, the Albatross does not feed on the wing, but as far as my experience carries me, invariably settles on the water before taking his prey;—therefore it follows that for "*whole days*" he does not feed. No wonder his heart is broken, and his body emaciated. But surely the writer could never suppose that the almighty and merciful Creator, who has so fully provided for the wants of all his creatures, would neglect to supply the wandering Albatross, and doom it to pine away in misery and a state of half-starvation!

Next comes a supposition, that the bird sleeps on the wing, and that the great distance from land at which it is seen at close of day is thought to favour the supposition; in support of which, a pretty quotation from MOORE is brought in, to prove, that "castles built in air," are as likely to break the rest of the wandering Albatross, as of man, his lord and master!



Now the Albatross being a sea-bird, and furnished with webbed feet—what hinders it from sleeping on the waves like other water-fowls?

Is not motion the effect of will? And does not sleep seal up our eyes in forgetfulness? How then can the Albatross continue its flight, when the will to move its pinions, and direct its course, is lost in sleep? The quotation proves the absurdity of the supposition by showing that the bird is “running his head against a wall!” What the wandering Albatross may do near land I cannot say, but at sea I never saw one rise so high even as the yards of the ship, although the Sooty Albatross (*Diomedea fuliginosa*) very frequently did.

With regard to the bird or birds which sailors call a “Booby\*,” I can say little, as I never had the good fortune to see one captured; but certainly from its flight and appearance at a distance, I should pronounce it to be a gull or petrel, but decidedly not an Albatross; here, however, I speak at random, and shall be happy to receive correction if necessary. Be it what it may, I cannot understand what “desperate necessity” there is for the bird’s sleeping on board of ship, when it has a fine smooth sea to rest on, and a pair of good broad webbed feet, and a thick impenetrable plumage, made for the very purpose of enabling it to rest on the waters; we know that all water-fowl resort to the land occasionally, and the Booby, being some hundreds of miles at sea, may choose to rest on the only solid footing it can find, in order to break the dull monotony of a daily seat on salt-water!

But joking apart, may I not ask, on what did the Booby rest, before ships had made the passage round the Cape? unless they could sleep on the water, their necessities must have been much more desperate than in the present day!

To the trivial names applied by sailors and casual observers, to these birds, I attach no value whatever, as I have seen the folly of trusting to such names; for instance, one of the Albatrosses which I caught on my last voyage to India, was termed by the officers of the ship, “a Mollymawk,” and they laughed at the idea of its being an Albatross, merely because in size and plumage it did not agree with the bird which they were accustomed to term an Albatross. Nevertheless, *it is* a true Albatross! Another bird, the Sooty Albatross, was named “a Peeroo!”

\* On 2nd May, “a Booby” was caught asleep on the rigging of the “*William Fairlie*.” It had the plumage wholly *brown*, and not white, as stated in Loudon. On being seized, it disgorged “five flying fish,” all of good size. Does not this prove that there is no *scarcity of food*?

Sailors, like landsmen, who form opinions of the operations of nature, from mere casual and superficial observation, without condescending to look into causes and effects, must of course very often come to erroneous and ridiculous conclusions. Witness the following anecdote which occurred to me :

The boatswain told one of the passengers that the stormy petrels, or Mother Cary's Chickens, make no nest, but lay two white eggs on the water, and then take them under their wings to hatch them ; during this time the male bird supplies the female with food !

This fable is, I believe, current among the lower class of seamen.

On telling this story, however, the *chief officer* laughed very heartily, and cautioned me not to receive as gospel every "yarn the boatswain chose to spin ;" but lo ! in a very few minutes, *he* told me *as truth*, a story which appeared to me fully as marvellous as the other : He said, that in some of the islands to the southward, and about Cape Horn, there is a bird called the "King Penguin," which had a *pouch between its legs*, into which it puts its egg, (for the Penguin only lays one,) as soon as laid ; in this pouch the egg is kept for 24 hours, during which time the female remains on shore, but at the expiration of that time, the male bird, who is also furnished with a similar pouch, returns from his fishing excursions, and relieves the female by receiving the egg into his custody for the next 24 hours. They take a very long time to shift this egg from one pouch to the other, and although there are several species of Penguin on those islands none of them are furnished with a "*patent egg-boiler*," save his majesty the King Penguin of the Southern Isles !!

He added, that the bird may be induced to drop the egg, although reluctantly, by running a stick between its legs !!

Having offered these remarks, I shall proceed in my next, to give you an extract from my Journal, kept on the voyage, in which I noted down every circumstance connected with Natural History, and which being written not from memory, but from facts at the moment occurring, may perhaps be considered worthy of perusal.

Since writing the above, I have had an opportunity of perusing GIFFITH'S Translation of CUVIER, and find, that the Booby is stated to be the "*Pelecanus Sula*;" the plumage is thus described : "Belly and vent, all white, when young, all brown !" this is rather a meagre description, but nevertheless proves, that the Booby is not an Albatross, as supposed by the writer in Loudon's Nat. Hist.